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The art of juicing

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For Krissy Sciarra, the art of juicing is as challenging and enjoyable as creating gourmet meals — but without the fat, cholesterol and excess. Today, it's a glass of fennel juice with orange, lemon and mint. Tomorrow, beet juice with orange, turmeric and tarragon. Bottoms up!

Recipe testing has long been Sciarra's passion, and so has nutrition. That's why the Culinary Institute of America grad opened Harvest Juicery, a Chicago-based business she refers to as "a 21st century milkman that really does your body good." There, she creates 16-ounce bottles of cold-pressed juice at \$8 a pop, with flavors that range from tempting — watermelon, sweet basil and cayenne — to, well, very green — romaine, spinach, parsley, watercress, pomegranate. (Harvest Juicery will open a storefront at 1012 W. Lake by month's end.)

What started as a hobby — making juices for herself and friends — has morphed into a full-time business. Harvest Juicery sells eight juices (and one almond cashew milk blend), with deliveries to Chicago addresses. Sciarra's success hints that juicing, once considered something of a fringe trend for the hemp-wearing crowd, has gone mainstream. "My client is pretty much your corporate America client. They're the person on the go, they don't like to cook, they don't get their vegetables enough in a day," says Sciarra.

In fact, juicing is a quick and easy way to add nearly all of the recommended fruit and vegetable servings into one portable container, says Dawn Jackson Blatner, a Chicago-based registered dietitian who wrote an e-book on juicing, called "Get Juiced: Super-charged Nutrition Fresh from Your Blender."

Blatner says that if you're pondering a future in juicing, there are two types to consider. One is the classic method of juicing, in which you're extracting the juice from fruits and vegetables (cold-pressed juice, like that of Harvest Juicery, falls into this category). In that method, the result is a concentrated cup of go-juice. "There is no way I could eat a pound of carrots right now and half of an apple and a one-inch piece of raw ginger and a whole lemon. I cannot sit and eat that," says Blatner. "If I were to juice it, it concentrates all those nutrients and allows me to get a lot in a very little amount of time. That is the mega pro for juicing." The con: You lose the fiber, which makes you feel full and helps in digestion.

The other juicing method, called complete juicing, involves blending fruits and vegetables in a high-power blender. "The pro is, holy cow, you get the fiber. But because you're getting the fiber, you're going to fill up faster so it can't be as concentrated nutrition," says Blatner. "So you still can't eat a pound of carrots at a time."

Blatner recommends both forms of juicing, each for different reasons. Concentrated juicing, she says, is like a multi-vitamin. “I’m thinking about that as a mega powerhouse punch-in-the-face of vitamins and minerals,” she says. Complete juicing, then, is more of a snack or a healthy addition to a meal.

Whichever method a juicer chooses, Blatner cautions to be aware of just how much sugar they’re drinking. If you’re using only fruits, the concentration can be quite high. Blatner recommends that beginners aim for a blend of 50 percent fruit and 50 percent vegetable. If you like the taste, she says, try gradually increasing the veggies and lowering the fruit to control the sugar.

Juicing is something that anyone can do, says Blatner, but it takes time and preparation. In her book, she highlights the fact that you don’t have to invest in an expensive juicer to start juicing. A blender is, in fact, a wonderful gateway juicer (just expect to add additional liquids, such as herbal or green tea, to help break the fruits and veggies down).

She warns that the cost of fruits and vegetables adds up — and so does the potential for a mess. That explains why so many juicers enter the pulverizing fray with such enthusiasm and then lose interest. And that’s why juice businesses, like Harvest Juicery, are so successful.

“It does take a lot of time and care to buy all this produce and juice it,” says Blatner. “It is not as fast as getting something at the doughnut shop.”

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